Chapter 20 Professionalizing the Discipline of Victim Services

Abstract

As an occupation, victim assistance is characterized by a variety of organizations and agencies with a wide range of functions, as well as by a variety of practitioners with diverse backgrounds, qualifications, and perceptions of practice. This diversity provides a challenge to the conceptualization and realization of victim assistance as a professional discipline.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, students will understand the following concepts:

- The dynamic concept of professions.
- Characteristics of professions, especially as they pertain to victim assistance.
- Barriers to the professionalization of victim assistance.
- Professionalism as exhibited in fields other than victim assistance.
- Practical applications in crime victim services.

Introduction

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) describes the occupation of victim assistance as "a full-fledged advocacy and service field dedicated to meeting the physical, financial, and psychological needs of victims and their families" (OVC 1998, 153). This broad description provides a general definition of the purpose and activities of both organizations and individual practitioners.

Organizations may choose to be comprehensive and serve all types of crime victims (such as prosecutor-based programs) or be selective and serve only certain types of crime victims (such as rape crisis/sexual assault centers). Organizations may be government-based, private, or a combination of the two. Service delivery may be local, state, regional, national, or cross two of more of these jurisdictions.

Individual service providers range from full-time paid employees to part-time volunteers; from those with advanced degrees in social services, criminal or juvenile justice, health care, and other disciplines to those with no formal education; from those whose life history does not include personal criminal victimization to those who have survived the trauma of criminal victimization committed against them or a loved one.

The diversity of organizations and individuals who serve crime victims presents a challenge to *the field's emergence as a profession*. The task for the emerging profession of victim assistance is to define the components and

aspects of the profession, assess the extent of professionalization already achieved, and develop strategies to achieve further progress.

The Professionalization Continuum

In the early study of professions, scholars identified a set of specific criteria that could be applied to occupations in order to determine their status. In a time when society was served by relatively few professions--i.e., medicine, law, and religion most noted (Carr-Saunders 1966; Wilensky 1964), the identification of a cluster of traits or stages was appropriate. As society became more economically and socially complex through industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization, the study of professions shifted from this rigid, static concept of essential components towards recognizing professionalization as a dynamic process in which an occupation could strive towards the ideal of a profession. Instead of asking "whether . . . any particular group is `really a profession,' . . . it is much more fruitful to ask `how professionalized,' or more specifically `how professionalized in certain identifiable respects' a given occupation may be" (Vollmer and Mills 1966, vii).

The concept of professionalization as a dynamic process suggests a continuum with various occupations distributed between the two extremes. There is a constant push from occupational groups to become more professional and to claim public recognition as a profession. The essence of these emerging or marginal professions is that the occupation is in a transitional state between non-professional and professional (Barber 1963).

Placement on the continuum is not stagnant. Professions evolve due to the interactive effects of increasing specialization and the necessity for professional association with one another. Evolution is further accelerated by complexity in society and by an ever-expanding knowledge base (Houle, Cyphert, and Boggs 1987). The concept of professionalization as a dynamic process allows for consideration of the extent or degree of professionalization that an occupation has achieved based on various characteristics.
Cyril Houle (1980) suggests three groups of characteristics that reflect the professionalization of an occupation: conceptual, performance, and collective identity.

CONCEPTUAL CHARACTERISTIC

A profession must state and define its mission and foundations of practice. This definition may not, however, be congruent with the realities of practice. That is, what a professional actually does may not be consistent with the stated mission of the profession. This situation may be due to organizational dynamics or a response to changing societal needs.

Historically, professionals were free agents and practiced independently. In modern society, however, they are increasingly employed by bureaucratic organizations, which can place important restrictions on the autonomy of the professional. The functions and values of these two institutions--the profession and the organization--may create conflicts between the professional and the organization.

Evolving societal needs also affect the mission of a profession. Professional knowledge is "pluralistic, socially constructed, contextually defined, and constantly altering" (Baskett 1993, 15). The public perception of a profession's mission and purpose evolves over time as social circumstances change. Social perception, however, may conflict with that expressed by the profession.

The stated mission of the victim assistance discipline offered by OVC is broad enough to include all types of victim service practitioners. However, the mission may not always operate in complete congruence with the values or priorities of the employing organization or the community.

PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS

These characteristics refer to the knowledge and skills base of professional practice and personal development. There are four characteristics in this group: mastery of theoretical knowledge; capacity to solve problems; use of practical knowledge; and self-enhancement.

Mastery of theoretical knowledge. Theory and philosophy provide a guide to describe and understand the problems and circumstances of the world as they apply to the particular occupational area. A profession need not have its own unique theoretical foundation; newer professions in particular draw upon existing theoretical fields in order to understand the unique features of practice. Young (1993) notes that there is "growing acceptance of the theoretical underpinnings of the field of victimology and victim assistance" (p. 397). Victimology as a discipline is typically considered within the realm of criminology. The field of victim assistance, though, draws from many disciplines, including sociology, psychology, biology, and education.

Capacity to solve problems. Houle (1980) proposes that "the ultimate test of the success of a professional is the ability to solve problems (or decide that they cannot be solved), and those problems usually involve vital and deeply significant outcomes" (p. 43). The problems faced by professionals tend to be characterized by uniqueness, uncertainty, or value conflict. "How one frames professional problems and the range of solutions available are what differentiates an expert from a novice" (Bennet and Fox 1993).

Problem solving is a primary function of victim assistance. The role of victim assistance in "helping victims assess where they are, where they want to go, and how to get there" (Friedman and Tucker 1997) reflects the dynamic of problem solving. Regardless of the type of offense or whether there are numerous victims associated with one crime, such as the 1995 bombing of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, each and every victimization brings unique circumstances that do not necessarily follow a predictable and orderly model or respond to a specific technique of intervention.

Use of practical knowledge. A professional area should have a substantial body of knowledge and techniques that reflect the practical application of the field. Practical knowledge is the techniques and strategies, based in theoretical

inquiry, that have been found useful through experience. The increased presence of victim assistance literature, including academic journals, books, newsletters, Web sites and listserv discussion groups, is evidence of the applied literature and resources that help to expand practitioners' skill base.

Self-enhancement. Finally, Houle promotes the value of self-enhancement as a professional characteristic. Self-enhancement refers to the continued pursuit of knowledge and understanding in those areas of study and interest not directly related to the occupation. This is valuable not only for the insights, perspectives, and creativity gained by rounded learning, but also for self-preservation and personal vitality. A balanced self is critical for effective victim assistance practice which, by nature, is characterized by unique stressors that may lead to ineffective practice.

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY CHARACTERISTICS

The professionalization of an occupation depends on the establishment of a collective identity through structures and systems that foster and maintain the conceptual and competency characteristics. Houle identified nine collective identity characteristics: formal training, credentialing, creation of a subculture, legal reinforcement, public acceptance, ethical practice, penalties, relations to other vocations, and relations to users of the service.

Formal training. This characteristic refers to the "formal processes for the transmission of the explanatory theories, doctrines (systems of values), applied theories, and practice theories" (Harris 1993, 34). Education--characteristically formal, university-based programs of study--is seen as one of the key determinants of all other professional characteristics. Formal training is considered a lifelong endeavor for the professional and, as such, includes continuing professional education. Houle (1980) notes that "the necessity to keep on learning throughout life seems so obvious to the leaders of most professions that they believe its self-evidence will cause it to be internalized within the value system and pattern of actions of every practitioner" (p. 85).

Formal university-based pre-service programs, though limited in number, do exist in the field of victim services. A review of victim assistance education programs (DeHart 1998) found that half of the existing programs were at least connected to universities. The others identified were state- or private-based programs not associated with an academic institution. Many of the education programs reviewed could be considered continuing education programs, university-based and otherwise.

Credentialing. Credentialing is a mechanism for setting standards of competency. It is the formal means of identifying individuals by occupational group. There are variations of credentialing that reflect different levels of requirements and oversight. The Office for Victims of Crime (1998) recommends the development of national certification standards for victim assistance. Universities, state agencies with regulatory authority, and professional

associations currently offer varying aspects of credentialing in victim services (DeHart 1998).

Creation of a subculture. A profession should nurture a subculture of attributes that distinguishes it from other occupations. This subculture promotes a professional identity that enhances the field's uniqueness. The formal institutions of the universities, professional associations, and work organizations serve as venues for the socialization of the professional subculture. Furthermore, continuing professional education also enhances the sense of professional affiliation and identity.

A dynamic of victim assistance that affects the professional subculture is the grass roots nature of the field. Historically, victim services were started and rendered by "predominantly lay people: volunteers and former victims" (Davis and Henley 1990, 163). The subculture of victim assistance includes an awareness of the relatively brief history of the field through the literature (OVC 1998; Young 1990), pre-service education, and continuing education. Job titles continue to be a source of variability and confusion. Practitioners lack a common identifying job title and clear and required standards for entering the field. Even the terminology reflects the diversity of approaches such as the often impassioned discourse on the term "victim" versus "survivor."

Legal reinforcement. Professions should seek legislative, judicial, and administrative support or rulings to protect the rights of practice, such as the right to practice the profession and the right to maintain confidentiality. According to one perspective, professions vie for exclusivity or monopoly of practice. In order to do this, an occupation must develop a special relationship, a regulative bargain, with the state that is conditioned and approved by the political power network.

Privileged communication or confidentiality is one of the most important of professional privileges and is owed in return for the trust that a client places in a professional. In many cases, though, the relationship between a victim advocate and a victim is *not* protected under law. Approximately one-half of all states have some type of law established in the area of victim protection concerning disclosure of confidential information shared with counselors and advocates.

Victim assistance has gained little in the way of legal reinforcement of professional activities. Many of the practice elements may be considered within the domain of other occupational areas; thus, "the multiple and competing professional organizations may be divisive" (Hall 1968) and may resist the professionalization and legitimization of victim services.

Public acceptance. The general public should be made aware of a profession's value to society. "The inception of a new occupation implies that certain specific work activities are valued enough such that those activities become distinctively differentiated from others and publicly recognized" (Moore 1970, 52). Thus, in order to attain professional status, an occupation must engage in image building to increase its social prestige.

Victim assistance has been proactive in public education about violence and victim rights issues. National Crime Victims' Rights Week, for example, is a time when victim service organizations across the nation focus on public awareness and victim outreach. "Increasing public awareness of victimization is critical to ensuring that victims receive the services they need and that victim assistance programs continue to be supported" (OVC 1998, 184). While public education activities may not be exclusively focused on victim assistance as a profession, they do promote awareness of the field's contributions to society.

Ethical practice. Professions should develop guidelines or codes for ethical practice. A professional code of ethics is part informal and part formal, and essentially describes the terms of relations to the client, other professionals, and society. Houle (1980) advises that a code should be "a broad summary of the moral behavior that is expected of every practitioner and that becomes a guiding though constantly reinterpreted tradition, somewhat like the American Bill of Rights" (p. 65-66).

Victim assistance struggles with ethical obligations. For example, most practitioners would identify the victim as its chief client. But practitioners may also be obliged to serve the justice system, which may be in conflict with the needs of the victim as a client. Practitioner competence is another area. Obliged to "undertake only those tasks that are within their competence . . . the determination of what counts as sufficient or minimally adequate competence . . . is a complex problem" (Ozar 1993, 169). At what point during the provision of comprehensive services to victims should/can a practitioner refer to another profession and what is the availability of service by that profession?

The Office for Victims of Crime has recommended a code of ethics for victim service providers (OVC 1998). The National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) are two national organizations that have developed codes of ethics.

Penalties. Professional members who are incompetent or who act in an unethical manner may face penalties that include financial sanctions, exclusion or expulsion from certain areas of practice or from special privileges, and, the ultimate sanction, termination of the right to practice. Professional associations or the state may serve as formal disciplinary bodies.

Though there are state and specialty variations, victim assistance as a field is not unified under a national governmental agency or professional association. While governmental and national entities support initiatives for professionalization, they do not have the authority to establish firm standards for individual practitioners or sanctions against incompetent or unethical practitioners. The Office for Victims of Crime has, however, recommended the development of a means of accountability along with the development of a code of ethics (OVC 1998).

Relations to other vocations. There is a need to define and maintain role relationships among the allied occupations. As an occupation becomes professionalized, "a complex and usually ambivalent relationship grows up

between them and each of the occupational groups with which they work, particularly those which are more highly professionalized then they are" (Houle 1980, 67). As the technical and social complexity of professional practice evolves, professions may split off into specializations or they may subprofessionalize, that is, the "spinning off to subordinates of professional duties that do not require full professional training" (Moore 1970, 174).

Victim assistance practitioners interact with an array of other professions, most of whom can be considered farther along on the scale of professionalization. Many of the victim assistance tasks may be considered subspecializations of law, mental health, and other fields. However, crime victimization is a unique event (Young 1990) and, as such, the focus on the victim client requires unique knowledge and skills. The challenge for victim assistance is to develop and define its role in collaboration--not conflict--with allied professions. The Office for Victims of Crime has issued a series of recommendations for effective and responsive victim service for all criminal and juvenile justice professions, as well as the professions of health care, mental health, law, education, the faith community, business, and the news media (OVC 1998).

Relations to the users of service. The final characteristic is the formal relationship between practitioners and the people who use their professional services. There are several general models of the professional-client relationship. An interactive model is when both parties have "unique and irreplaceable contributions to make in the decision-making process" (Ozar 1993, 167). This ideal of the professional-client relationship is common to most interactions in modern society. This model is consistent with the view of the professional-client relationship from a reflective practitioner model in which the professional agrees to "help the client understand the meaning of the professional's advice and the rationale for his actions, while at the same time he or she tries to learn the meanings his actions have for his client" (Schon 1983, 297).

While victims do not choose to be victimized, they do have choices in their interactions with the professions. For example, considering that only 38 percent of all crimes are reported to law enforcement (USDOJ 1997), victims exercise fundamental choices about whether to interact with the criminal or juvenile justice system. Since individual needs and responses to victimization vary greatly, services for recovery should be individualized accordingly. Thus, the interactive model of the professional-client relationship is most appropriate.

Barriers to Professionalization

As presented in the discussion of the characteristics of professionalization, victim assistance as an occupational field has only minimally accomplished many of the characteristics. Houle (1980) cautions, however, that the characteristics presented cannot "ever be completely and finally achieved . . . but as an occupational group raises the level of its performance of various characteristics, its right to call itself a profession increases, as does its right to expect society to view it as one . . . a professionalizing vocation must strive towards many goals,

and therefore they try to achieve some or all of the characteristics suggested here as well as others that may be unique to their particular work" (p. 74).

As a field, victim assistance must strive to reduce the barriers to professionalization. These barriers include addressing the conflicts among the various service agents regarding consensus of mission or purpose and the lack of occupational identity. The field must address external conflicts with closely related occupations. As an emerging profession, victim assistance must strive for collaboration, not competition. Finally, victim assistance must establish its unique knowledge, expertise, and skills so that professional autonomy may be exercised within the various bureaucratic organizations. The more an organization depends on adaptation and innovation for its survival, the more it will invest itself as a learning organization (Senge 1990) and will encourage professional problem solving.

Comparisons to Other Professions

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Attempts at professionalization of law enforcement were first undertaken in the 1800s and continue to this day. Reformation of American policing was a reaction to corruption that was rampant both in city halls and the hallways of many major police departments. Starting in the late 1800s, reforms were initiated within police departments across the United States. One reform was the establishment of police commissions as a way to remove elected officials from control of the department. The imposition of civil service exams was another reform. The use of these exams was an effort to remove favoritism in the selection and promotion of officers within the department. This approach to selection of officers did eventually improve the quality and professionalism of departments across the nation.

The second major phase of reforms within the police community occurred during the first half of the 1900s through the late 1960s when police administrators begin to demand that police officers conduct themselves as professionals. This approach involved accepting the position that police officers were knowledgeable and honest and that departments could be effectively administered. This second wave of reform was far more effective than its earlier counterpart, and as a result, police chiefs gained more control over their officers and departments (Wallace, Roberson, and Steckler 1995).

Reform continues to the present day as police chiefs and the departments they run more readily accept the principle that they are a microorganism of the society they serve. Law enforcement officers typically go through an intensive training or academy program, and increasingly, departments require, or at least give preference to, applicants with college degrees. Police departments have also been more active in connecting with the public through community policing initiatives and community/citizen review boards, thus enhancing public acceptance of and involvement with the profession.

EDUCATION

Like victim assistance practitioners, educators work in a variety of settings and with different and diverse populations. They work in public schools, correctional institutions, and workplace organizations. They work with the very young and the very old; with individuals who are highly competent and motivated and with individuals with limited skills. Also similar to victim services, there are many volunteers.

This diversity of educators tends to segment the field into various groups, such as educators of children and educators of adults. As a profession, most educators have had formal university-based training. In most settings, educators are required to have some level of credentials, often a combination of an academic degree and some level of state licensure or certification.

Public acceptance of education as a value to society is relatively high. Educators do tend, and in some states are required, to participate in continuing education; a positive correlation has been found between continuing education and professionalization of the field of education (Jackson 1970; Childers 1993).

LAW

Each state regulates the training and qualifications of those who desire to practice law. Attorneys are regulated by state or federal statutes that define their duties and responsibilities. Additionally, state, federal, and national bar associations have informal or nonbinding rules that most attorneys follow. An example is the American Bar Association.

Most states or jurisdictions require a formal period of study or internship followed by an examination before a person may practice law. Many states also require attorneys to keep their skills or knowledge updated. These requirements are known by a variety of names, but all involve some sort of formal educational process. For example, in California, attorneys must complete thirty-six hours of education every three years. Eighteen of these hours must be in a formal educational or participatory setting and the other eighteen hours may be self-study that can be accomplished on an individual basis.

A person admitted to the bar in one state must apply for admission to practice in another state. Some states allow attorneys who have been admitted to practice law in another state to "waive" the requirements of a formal examination, assuming a formal application process is made and certain other requirements are met. However, the majority of states require attorneys from other states to pass some sort of examination in order to practice law in their jurisdiction.

Practical Applications in Crime Victim Services

A variety of skills are necessary to enhance the ability of victim service providers to do their jobs well, make a difference in the lives of traumatized victims, and collaborate with allied organizations and the community. There is a wide range of victim services, from basic (very limited) to comprehensive. Typically, the job description of the victim assistance provider is defined by the

employing organization. And just as typically, a victim service provider's duties often extend far beyond his or her job title and duty statements.

Victim assistance staff serve in various disciplines, such as child advocacy, domestic violence, sexual assault, law enforcement, prosecutor's programs, community and institutional corrections, juvenile justice system, and emergency assistance. The field of victim services includes volunteers, interns, survivors, caseworkers, administrative staff and social workers. Some victim practitioners have extensive formal education, while others have little or none.

Why do victim service practitioners need to continue their education and skills development in victim services? While advocates are not expected to be "experts" in all areas of service, it is helpful to have basic knowledge of the discipline, as well as requirements of victim advocacy, because:

- Victims, survivors, employers, co-workers, allied professionals, and the general public expect competence, integrity and protection from further harm.
- Skilled practitioners become more valuable to employers and the community and demonstrate their skills through the development of quality programs.
- Practitioners need to forge professional relationships with other experienced and highly skilled professionals to enhance the profession, to collaborate in efforts that mutually benefit victims, and to promote public safety.

The old adage that "victim service providers wear a lot of hats" is an understatement. Victim advocates have traditionally been considered "generalists," with *a little knowledge* about *a lot of topics*. Service providers are often asked, "What type of background do you have that prepared you to become a victim advocate?" While the answers are varied, from people who have strong academic credentials to survivors of crime who became advocates to effect positive change, one thing is often true: Victim advocacy is a developing profession that has a great deal of "on-the-job training." Little can prepare an individual for the many challenges that victim service providers face in their daily work. Education, experience, commitment, empathy, listening skills, and plenty of courage are assets that are common to, and necessary to affect change in the lives of crime victims and to assume the professional responsibilities of victim advocates across the nation and abroad.

It is important to note that the field of victim advocacy has become *very specialized*, with professionals developing a great deal of expertise in specific topical areas, particularly in assisting different types of victims, or working within the community non profit area or with government based programs. These specialties are addressed elsewhere throughout the Academy text. *This section seeks to describe specific skills and attributes that are common areas of expertise and skills applicable to many victim service practitioners, regardless of their particular discipline or specialty area.*

The following is a list of fifty skills and responsibilities that victim service providers find "common" to the practice of victim assistance, their agencies, the

community and their colleagues. These are intended to provide a "snapshot" of the wide variety of skills and capabilities that contribute to effective victim advocacy and service.

1. *Advocacy for victims' rights*. When gaps are identified that affect the provision of comprehensive, quality victim assistance, victims' rights advocacy addresses such deficiencies. This can include advocating for an individual victim, a group of victims, or significant changes in laws through public policy development and implementation.
2. *Case management*. Maintaining accurate, current data about clients served, and the ability to generate cumulative reports about overall cases, are important skills for victim advocates. It requires juggling multiple cases representing many different victims' needs at the same time, as well as knowledge of allied professional services that can ensure that victims' cases are managed in an efficient and collaborative manner.
3. *Client assessment*. While victim advocates should not be expected to be "experts" in mental health, social services, medicine, and other allied professions, they should be knowledgeable about how to effectively assess victims to identify their most salient needs, and then work to meet them. A number of client assessment tools are utilized across the nation to determine the most urgent and critical needs of victims.
4. *Change management*. As a rapidly evolving discipline, victim services are subject to constant change due to our ever-evolving public policy legislative changes, and increasing public awareness of the issues that affect crime victims. This ongoing dynamic can result in confusion, turmoil, and stress if not well managed. Change management incorporates skills that help professionals predict and better cope with change, and reinforces change as a positive factor that enhances the discipline of victim services as a whole, and individual victims and service providers specifically.
5. *Community crisis response*. The protocols pioneered by the National Organization for Victim Assistance include critical skills for many victim assistance providers and organizations who may be called upon to respond to crimes or disasters that affect a large number of victims and/or entire communities. Examples include the Oklahoma City bombing and murders, recent assaults and murders of children in schools at the hands of classmates, and terrorism involving mass destruction at U.S. embassies and other sites abroad.
6. *Civil litigation*. When some victims feel they have not achieved "justice" through the criminal or juvenile justice system, they can pursue civil remedies. Victim advocates should be aware of the various avenues of civil litigation available to victims, and be able to make appropriate referrals to legal professionals.
7. *Coalition building*. A critical strength of America's victims' rights discipline has been its ability to make victim issues and concerns a priority for literally everybody, from allied professionals to public policy makers to members of the community. The ability to forge alliances with potential

partners to further the cause of victims' rights is a true asset for any victim service provider.

8. *Community organizing*. When the late Speaker of the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress Tip O'Neill said "all politics are local," he could have been describing the field of victim services. With a strong grassroots foundation, this evolving discipline has, and will continue to, rely upon the "power of the personal story" and the commitment of community-based activists to organize and effect positive change that benefits victims. In addition, the community's investment in justice, which results in individual and neighborhood safety and protections, has become increasingly clear.
9. *Conference and seminar coordination*. Many advocates coordinate training for their staff, allied professions, communities and regions. Due to the high cost of travel and the limited training funds available, it is becoming more common for professional victim assistance associations to develop and coordinate their own training programs.
10. *Conflict management*. As in any discipline, conflicts abound between and among individuals, agencies, and jurisdictions, to name a few. The ability to help understand, manage, and resolve conflict (while not adding to the dissension) is a critical skill for professionals and volunteers who assist victims.
11. *Continuing education*. A significant component of a victim advocate's professional development is continuing education. Opportunities are available through the National Victim Assistance Academy (and increasingly, through state-level academies), state/regional/local coalition training efforts, higher education, and other opportunities. Participation in allied professional associations at the local, state and national levels also offers good venues for continuing education, particularly in specialty areas of victim assistance and criminal or juvenile justice.
12. *Counseling*. The capacity to effectively access victims' needs for counseling and provide appropriate referrals and/or counseling services is a basic skill that must be possessed by all victim assistance professionals.
13. *Crisis counseling and intervention*. A comprehensive knowledge of victim trauma and additional stressors likely to produce crisis reactions, along with appropriate communication, listening, crisis response, and intervention skills, are necessary.
14. *Cross-cultural services*. In the "melting pot" that is America, knowledge about different cultures, their values and beliefs, and culturally appropriate responses is a core skill necessary to provide basic victim assistance services. Outreach to a variety of different cultural and ethnic groups is becoming a mainstay of victim assistance in communities large and small, urban and rural across America and abroad.
15. *Crime scene cleanup*. Many victim assistance providers assist with the clean up of vandalized property, homicide and violent crime scenes and assist in cleaning property examined by law enforcement for fingerprints.
16. *Criminal and justice system knowledge.* Knowledge of and familiarity with the criminal justice process are critical for advocates. It is important to

know what criminal justice services are available locally on a state, as well as federal, level so as to make appropriate referrals and help victims navigate this process.

17. *Death notification*. Knowledge of the extensive, profession-specific guidelines for death notification developed by Mothers Against Drunk Driving is necessary for any victim advocate whose job responsibilities include providing services to surviving family members and loved ones of homicide, drunk driving, manslaughter, or mass victimizations resulting in death.
18. *Education and partnerships with academia*. In order to prepare the "next generation" of victim advocates, it is crucial to create a strong academic foundation in institutions of higher education. Through the development of baccalaureate, masters, and doctorate programs in victimology, as well as curriculum infusion of victims' issues and victimology theory into existing departments, the discipline of victim assistance will increase its professionalism, as well as broaden the scope of individuals who seek to become victim advocates. The National Victim Assistance Academy is an excellent example of partnerships with academia that promote professional development.
19. *Grant writing*. The capability to identify resources for grants, and develop successful proposals for research, evaluation, demonstration programs, program development, innovative partnerships, training and technical assistance has become a basic skill crucial to many victim advocates.
20. *Historian*. As the discipline of victim assistance rapidly approaches its fourth decade of service to America, it is essential for service providers to understand and appreciate the rich history of victims' rights and, in particular, the significant contributions made by crime victims themselves. The heartbreaks, struggles and frustrations that marked the early days of victims' rights and services have provided the foundation for an era where quality victim services abound, collaborative efforts among justice and allied professions are becoming more common, and victim trauma and losses are recognized. Through the pioneering efforts of countless individuals who were hurt by crime, and who were determined to prevent others from enduring the indignities they did, as well as leadership from the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime and thousands of victim assistance organizations, the field of victim services is shifting from a "movement" to a respected and valued professional discipline.
21. *Information and referral*. There are over 9,000 national, state and local victim assistance programs, and countless allied professionals agencies and organizations whose services are relevant to victims. Knowledge of these resources is an important asset to victim service providers. The information contained in the annual *National Crime Victims' Rights Week Resource Guide* (VALOR 1995-1999) offers comprehensive referral resources, as does the Internet (by utilizing a search engine with the phrase "crime victims" as a guide). It is also important to ensure that referrals are existing and appropriate, which can be accomplished by

making an initial screening call to determine a referral agency's location, existence, and capabilities for victim assistance.

22. *Information technology*. Technological innovations have expanded the possibilities of victim assistance beyond anyone's vision or imagination thirty years ago. Use of the Internet (including e-mail, web sites, and discussion groups), management information systems, automated victim notification and restitution systems and services, and other technological resources have proven extremely valuable to victim service providers who seek to streamline information and referrals, case management, implementation of victims' rights, research, and continuing education opportunities.
23. *Intervention on behalf of victims*. Many victims require direct intervention with employers, creditors, insurance companies, teachers, and justice or allied professionals, among others. Often, a simple telephone call, letter, or e-mail can resolve a stressful situation for a victim.
24. *Justice system expertise*. Knowledge about laws, policies, procedures and protocols involved in the criminal, juvenile, federal and civil justice systems is a basic (and often vital) aspect of victim advocacy. Through collaboration and cross training with allied justice professionals, victim service providers can promote understanding of and sensitivity to victims' rights and needs, from crisis intervention at the time of the crime, through assistance at parole hearings and the appellate level.
25. *Nonprofit management*. Approximately half of America's victim assistance programs are nonprofit and community-based. This distinction requires knowledge of and adherence to laws and policies that guide nonprofit organizations, as well as strong resource development skills to ensure a continuous base of funding.
26. *Professional development*. This is an ongoing process that provides exciting opportunities for victim advocates to keep apprised of techniques, trends, innovations, and creative programming ideas that can enhance their personal and professional development. Many skills are derived from victim-specific training programs and state and national conferences. Other training opportunities are offered through in-service training and also through the process of listening and learning from others on a regular basis. As one victim advocate said, "With each victim I help, I become better prepared and more able to assist victims in the future."
27. *Program administration*. Responsibilities such as financial management, staff/volunteer recruitment and management, program development and management, strategic planning, board development, and developing collaborative initiatives with allied professions are among the many core elements of administration. A knowledge of people, training, quality services and innovative program development is necessary.
28. *Program development*. Most victim assistance organizations must develop programs "from scratch" with minimal amount of funding, while competing with other agencies who are also constantly seeking ways to augment and enhance their activities. Program development includes assessing needs, staff training, resource development and information seeking initiatives.

Model programs using innovative and creative strategies are considered "promising practices" for replication. This area requires a basic knowledge of program evaluation and quality programming.

29. *Program evaluation*. The ability to measure the effectiveness and success of victim services is very important and critical to an agency's continued success. Program evaluation is often considered "the weak link" in victim services. No program or activity should be continued unless it can be substantiated and measured as effective.
30. *Property repair*. Some victim assistance providers provide services to domestic violence victims and burglary victims in the form of property repair and installation of deadbolt locks and peepholes (security devices and appliances). Frequently, this repair work restores a sense of security and safety to the victim that was significantly compromised by the crime. Some victim compensation programs actually pay for the locks that are installed for the safety of crime victims. In some communities, crime repair crews comprised of nonviolent offenders under careful supervision of a probation officer perform this function as well.
31. *Public policy and implementation*. The majority of crime victims' rights have a local, state or federal law to support them. Since the passage of the first victims' rights law to provide victim compensation in California in 1965, there have been over 30,000 laws passed that define and protect victims' rights (NCVC 1998). Knowledge of existing laws, and skills in organizing coalitions to promote legislative education and the implementation of laws, are considered core skills for victim advocates.
32. *Public relations and media outreach*. Victims and members of the community may be unaware of victims' rights and services and public protection initiatives. Therefore, they may not access services or become involved in community safety programs. Basic skills in marketing, media relations, community and public outreach are rapidly becoming elements of the basic job description of a victim advocate.
33. *Public speaking*. Comfort in addressing small and large groups in order to provide information and resources about, and encouragement to support, victim assistance initiatives, is a basic attribute of victim advocacy.
34. *Research*. While victim advocates are not required to be researchers at an academic level, they can achieve professional advancement by being familiar with the core principles of research and evaluation. In addition, many victim service programs partner with researchers and academicians to co-sponsor "research-to-practice" initiatives. Basic research relevant to victims' rights and services can also be achieved through good case management (data collection and analysis), conducting focus group and victim satisfaction surveys, and participating in advisory capacities to research projects.
35. *Resource development*. Nonprofit victim organizations, as well as some public sector agencies, rely on external funding sources to support their programs and services. As such, many victim advocates find themselves organizing special events, writing grants, pursuing cause-related marketing opportunities, and developing direct mail funding appeals

(among other fund-raising activities) as part of their duties. There are myriad resources to help victim service providers hone their fund-raising skills, including electronic information on the Internet and local training programs geared specifically toward nonprofit fund-raising.

36. *Specific needs victims assistance*. Victims who are young or old, or with mental or physical disabilities, or who reside in highly urban or extremely remote jurisdictions (among others), require services that are sensitive to their unique situations. While technological enhancements can enhance the provision of victim services to specific needs populations, a basic understanding of challenges and barriers such victims face is an important asset to victim service providers, especially to meet such victims' needs within the criminal and juvenile justice systems.
37. *Strategic planning*. The victims' rights discipline on the edge of the millennium is a culmination of decades of planning and vision. As this field becomes more visible, viable, specialized, and focused, the need for ongoing strategic planning that promotes partnerships with allied professionals and volunteers is essential to develop a productive path for the future.
38. *Stress management*. As this list of recommended skills for victim advocacy is reviewed, one's stress level is likely to rise! Victim service providers work in some of the most stressful environments imaginable, and dealing with the emotional trauma of victimization can take its toll. The ability to identify sources of stress, and develop positive skills to cope and manage both stress and potential burnout, can be a career-saving skill for victim advocates.
39. *Substance abuse and addiction assessment and interventions*. Too many victims fall prey to abuse of alcohol and other drugs as a means to cope with the pain and trauma they endure. And too many victim advocates use alcohol and other drugs as a means to cope with the acute and chronic stress of their jobs. An understanding of why victims and advocates might use or abuse alcohol and other drugs, treatment options, and the importance of forging alliances (and sponsoring cross training) with substance abuse professionals, is a vital skill for victim advocates.
40. *Support group facilitation*. Since the inception of the victims' rights field in the United States, mutual support groups have been at the very foundation of victim services: victims helping other victims cope with the trauma and pain of their victimization, and providing greatly needed support that can facilitate healing. Often, victim advocates help organize and facilitate support groups, frequently with support from mental health professionals who have education credentials and backgrounds specific to victim trauma and grieving.
41. *Training*. "Each one, teach one" could be the mantra of America's victims' rights discipline. The incredible advancement in both victims' rights and services has been accomplished largely through efforts to train, and cross-train, professionals and volunteers whose duties involve victim assistance. General and specialized training curricula and programs relevant to victim

assistance have forged a path of growth and development throughout this emerging profession.

42. *Translation and interpretive services*. More and more advocates work with specific populations such the deaf and non-English speaking victims. Many of these individuals would be even more isolated without the support of services that facilitate their active participation in justice processes, and ability to access support and assistance.
43. *Technical assistance*. When a victims' rights/services program or initiative is proven to be effective, it should be replicated in other jurisdictions. Technical assistance provides ongoing means of providing guidance, advice and support to allied professionals and helps reduce the isolation that providers feel in the field.
44. *Trauma intervention and response*. A very specialized field called traumatology has emerged that focuses specifically on responses, interventions, services and treatment of the grief, loss and suffering endured by crime victims. Trauma training is a critical component of victim advocacy in order to be able to identify and meet the mental health needs of victims. This is an area where partnerships between researchers and practitioners have reaped considerable useful information to delineate trauma reactions, responses and interventions that are helpful to victims. A number of new therapies have been introduced as a means to help victims reduce stress and reactions to victimization and trauma.
45. *Victim activism*. Many victims who feel that justice was not served in their particular cases seek measures to change and improve justice processes, societal attitudes, and even the provision of victim services. It is important for victim advocates to be able to provide "avenues for activism" to victims who are looking for ways to speak out and effect change on a local, state, and/or national level.
46. *Victim/offender programming*. As restorative justice and community justice initiatives emerge to identify and involve victims, offenders and the community as "clients" of justice processes, there has been an increase in the numbers of victim/offender programs across the nation. Victim/offender mediation or dialogue, victim impact panels, family group conferencing, sentencing circles, and victim impact panels are examples of programs where victims define the harm caused by crime, and encourage offenders to confront and take responsibility for their actions and the consequences to their victims, their own families, their communities, and themselves. Victim/offender programs require strong partnerships with allied professionals to effectively and compassionately respond to victims. They also should carefully screen crime victims to determine if they are ready for, and/or appropriate for, participation in such programs on a strictly *voluntary* basis.
47. *Victim compensation*. In most states there is financial assistance available from state victim compensation programs. It is mandatory in states that receive VOCA funds for victim service providers to help victims apply for compensation. They also educate justice and allied professionals about victim compensation in order to create a seamless web of information and

resources that can help victims seek financial remuneration in accordance with federal and state laws.

48. *Victim restitution*. Perhaps the most difficult of all victims' rights to enforce, victim restitution holds offenders financially accountable for their criminal and delinquent actions. Victim advocates must forge crucial partnerships with court administrations, prosecutors, probation and parole agencies, and correctional agencies to make victim restitution a collaborative priority and value of all involved entities, and to create effective systems that result in the ordering, collection, dissemination and overall management of restitution.
49. *Violence prevention*. As a victim in the early 1990s observed, "the best victim is no victim." Attention to crime prevention directly reduces the number of crime victims in communities across America. Important partnerships have formed among prevention specialists, victim service providers, justice professionals, and community volunteers that focus on empowering neighborhoods to promote the personal safety of their inhabitants, intervening with at-risk youth to prevent potential victimization and/or delinquency, and involving community members as volunteers for both violence prevention and victim assistance initiatives. This is, indeed, an area in which victim service providers have a clear interest and stake in preventing future victimization.
50. *Volunteer management*. Volunteers created most victim assistance programs started in the early 1970s. The thousands of volunteers gain vision, direction, management, encouragement, and recognition from victim assistance and allied organizations that benefit from the volunteers' countless hours of service. It is common for many victim advocates to supervise individual volunteers, or manage entire volunteer programs or initiatives that support their agencies.

National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium

In September 1999, the Center for Child & Family Studies at the University of South Carolina has received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime to research and make recommendations concerning issues of standards and credentialing for victim service professionals. As a component of this project, a national Consortium has been selected and convened, comprised of a multidisciplinary group of victim service professionals with a broad range of experience, including direct service, nonprofit advocacy, and governmental/public policy. One of the goals of the Consortium is to build collective expertise on training and practice in victim services.

The Consortium is a cooperative working group, and each member brings unique interests and philosophies to the table. An important concern for the Consortium is development of an inclusive approach based on shared service goals. Professional standards must provide accessibility to persons from diverse backgrounds, including the victim-survivors, grassroots advocates, and volunteers who for so many years have defined the workforce. The Consortium will be vigilant to the number of ways that experience and training prepare

practitioners to provide quality service. Together, the varied professionals who comprise the Consortium will draft recommendations on program standards, training development, and professional competency (including ethical standards) for persons who work with victims of crime.

As a means of gathering input from the grassroots components of the victim assistance field, a series of "town hall" meetings were held in four diverse geographical locations: Augusta, ME; Boulder, CO; Topeka, KS; and Austin, TX. These meetings had a blended format--between a traditional town hall and a traditional focus group meeting--to provide a base for the Consortium's thinking. Because much has already been done in the field of victim services to examine roles and perspectives in the field (e.g., *New Directions from the Field*), the meetings were not intended as exhaustive surveys of the field, but rather as an opportunity to gather an inside view of practitioner concerns regarding training, standards, and other professional development issues.

The Consortium will consider a number of resources in making recommendations for the development of individual and program standards, including: findings from the town hall meetings; academic research pertinent to the development of standards within professions; historical development and evolution of the field of victim services; development of standards in other service-oriented professions; and existing state-based credentialing and other training programs for victim service professionals. Contact: Dr. Dana DeHart, Project Director, National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium (803-777-7867) or dana.dehart@sc.edu.

Promising Practices

- Certification or the credentialing of practitioners is receiving increasing attention in the field of victim assistance. One of the recommendations made in OVC's *New Directions from the Field* (1998) calls for a national commission to develop certification and accreditation standards. Some states have already addressed this issue through educational programs that offer some level of formal recognition. For example, the Florida Attorney General's Office has developed a Victim Services Practitioner Designation Program that VOCA recipients are encouraged to attend. The Oklahoma District Attorneys Council has contracted with a university to offer a certificate program that VOCA recipients are encouraged to complete.
- Standards also apply to programs not just practitioners. The National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) has established eight basic elements of service standards for programs.
- Victim services are increasingly becoming a recognized academic area by universities. California State University-Fresno is currently developing the first doctorate in victimology.
- Arizona is the only state that has passed laws making consultation between a crime victim and an advocate a privileged communication, giving all victims of crime this protection.

Professionalizing the Discipline of Victim Services Self-Examination

1. What is meant by the conceptual characteristic of a profession? What is the conceptual characteristic of victim assistance?

2. Identify one example of performance characteristics and illustrate how it applies to victim assistance.

3. Identify one example of collective identity characteristics and illustrate how it applies to victim assistance.

4. Identify one barrier to victim assistance professionalization.

5. Describe one of the fifty practical applications in crime victim services that is a priority in your job.

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